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ABSTRACT

The investigators in this continuing study at Towson State University, Maryland, followed up the experiences of preservice elementary teachers, as revealed by their journals and interviews, with an interview schedule for their college supervisors. Recurring patterns in the areas of: (1) view of work; (2) attitude; (3) personal relations; (4) practical skills; (5) investment; and (6) assessment were gleaned from a content analysis of the journals reviewed and the interviews conducted. Implications drawn from the data suggest ways to better monitor the work of beginning teachers, either at the preservice or inservice level, and ways to develop better teacher education programs that meet the needs of those beginning teachers. (Author)

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ASSESSING THE INDUCTION OF PRESERVICE TEACHERS

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Introduction

Studying the journals of teachers-in-training and the interviews of those subjects and their college supervisors has permitted the investigators of this study to use the experiences of preservice teachers to gather more complete information about the professional induction to teaching. The investigators trust that this inquiry will uncover ways and means useful for enhancing the present system for preparing teachers-in-training for induction into the world of full-time teaching.

Several steps were taken to conduct this preliminary study: (1) a content analysis of journals that subjects kept during their teaching experience, (2) a categorization of the experiences revealed in the journals, (3) an initial comparison and graphing of the entries, and (4) the development of an interview schedule prepared for follow-up work with the subjects and their college supervisors.

Why study this part of a preservice teacher's life? If meaningful introductory experiences are to be planned for students, if logical seminar content and reasonable counseling sessions are to be managed, and if problems, stresses and conflicts of beginning teachers are to be anticipated, then some evidence must be gleaned of the reactions and observations of our students' work in the several phases of teacher preparation. Presently much of the program critique in teacher education programs is ex post facto, i.e., final evaluations, follow-up questionnaires and debriefing sessions are used at the end of undergraduate programs. End of program review is probably too late to trace the most significant experiences, for how preservice teachers truly feel and think about their initial experiences has been obscured by subsequent events.

The investigators have found patterns emerging from the journals and interviews that have been obtained thus far, and they are confident that these contain signals that are relevant in planning for teacher preparation and induction.

Procedures

Students in the Elementary Education program at Towson State University maintain journals as part of a contract grading system in their Curriculum I Semester course work, the block of methods courses preceding the student teaching semester. The Curriculum I Semester has a one-day-a-week field experience component and this is the main substance for the journals in the first semester of data gathering.

In the journals the students are asked to document their day-to-day evolution as teachers by observing their instructors on campus, their cooperating teachers off campus, and each other during their field experiences. They are asked to begin to consider their own personal teaching style in relation to others and their styles of teaching. "Prompts" for the journals are given throughout the semester. The instructor reads the journals and "peer response" groups (usually three or four students) also read the journal entries of individuals periodically during the semester. Entries are not corrected or graded. Reactions to entries are noted in a variety of positive ways: underlines, exclamation points, smiley faces, commentaries, etc.

Students are asked, in keeping with this study, to volunteer to continue maintenance of their journals during their student teaching semester. The investigators react to the journals in the manner described above and return the journals to the student teachers as quickly as possible.

After scrutinizing the journals from both semesters, the investigators evolved a preliminary coding system as part of their content analysis of the journals received. B. F. Skinner's Principle of Serendipity, ". . . the art of discovering

one thing while looking for something else," reigned in the formation of both the molar categories and their subcategories.

In reading through the journals, the investigators found reoccurring items and these were used to form subcategories. The molar categories are groupings reasoned out from the various subcategories. Six molar categories: VIEW OF WORK, ATTITUDE, PERSONAL RELATIONS, PRACTICAL SKILLS, INVESTMENT and ASSESSMENT were extracted by the investigators as the most useful. These appeared to be general groupings appropriate for the many concerns and comments listed in the journals. Each molar category contains several subcategories (See Appendix).

Four sets of journals were selected for intensive study. Findings and patterns discerned in these are reported in the following section. The coding done on the sets of journals has been quantified and placed in graph form to enable the investigators to see patterns existing between each student's experiences and among the four students (See Appendix).

To examine further the internal consistency of the preliminary findings of this study, the investigators determined that a semi-structured interview schedule should be constructed as a next step in the study. Interview questions were derived from the molar categories of the coding system used by the researchers to study the original journal entries (See Appendix), and these were used with student-subjects and with the college supervisors who supervised them.

Findings

After entries in each journal were categorized, the totals in each category were placed in tables with raw scores and percentages of total entries (See Appendix). The investigators then studied the charts and the graphs that picture the proportions and found some contrasting as well as corresponding features in the profiles of the four students.

While continuing to inspect the entries in the journals (and the profiles these present in the categories) for more information and patterns, the following were initial findings:

View of Work (reflection on the teaching process; linking theory and practice):

Percentage of entries for semester one is high in this category for three students, but then emphasis diminishes in semester two. The fourth person's journal reflects a reverse situation.

Attitude (disposition toward school, children and situation):

Percentage of entries in this category tends to remain consistent from one semester to the next. Positive attitude entries represent a substantial portion of the entries in all four sets of journals.

Personal Relations (interactions with and feelings toward others):

Percentage of entries in this category tends to increase modestly from semester one to semester two. Perhaps as students mature and contact increases with children, other teachers and parents, then more importance is attached to this area.

Practical Skills (focus on how to-do-it):

Percentage of entires in this area increases from semester one to semester two for three of the four students. Most of this is an acknowledgement of classroom ideas, techniques, media and the like. Students appear to have an early concern for practical skills and continue to be intrigued with the "bag of tricks" that teachers possess.

Investment (commitment to teaching career):

In both semesters, the notation in this area is minimal. Investigators found little evidence of commitment or crusading spirit.

It is possible that this molar category overlaps with another molar category, "Attitude."

Assessment (evaluation of one's work and effectiveness):

This area includes a fair portion of the entries for three students--and most of these notations have to do with self assessment. Interestingly, the evidence suggests that students show less concern about assessment during the student teaching semester. Is anxiety about evaluation actually less at that time?

The areas that receive less attention during the second semester are View of Work and Assessment. The increases are in Personal Relations and Practical Skills. Is there a relationship between these areas that shows students becoming less analytical/evaluative as they move through student teaching and more oriented to tangible things and personal relations? Will that focus continue into first year teaching?

Interviews with the college supervisors of the four subjects were conducted to assess the consistency of the journal entries with what was observed in the field work. Unfortunately this process revealed little information that can be correlated with the substance of the journals.

The interviews were structured to elicit supervisor perception of the concerns that subjects had for those areas reflected in the molar categories. Unfortunately the supervisors could respond only with their own assessments of the subjects' performance and behavior. They did not know the individuals well enough to make an estimate of subjects' priorities and feelings during the student teaching semester.

The one area where fair insight was provided was in the Attitude category. With this, the supervisors had generally similar assessments as the student-subjects registered in their journal entries and subsequent interviews.

It may be helpful to develop a pre-interview seminar with college supervisors to go over background information, share journal entries and graphs, and to generally reacquaint them with the subjects at hand. This possibly would precipitate more information flow about the student-subjects' priorities, concerns and dispositions.

Interviewing the student-subjects was interesting but revealed limited amounts of information about the entries they had made previously in their journals. In that the interviews were structured, there was no way to compare the amount of statements in the interviews with the free write situation done with the journals.

At best the information from the interviews with the student-subjects was a good update on the thinking that had been done in the interval between the last journal entries and their current perceptions about their evolvement as teachers. The following summaries are gross comparisons that will require further study.

STUDENT A

View of Work: Appears to maintain similar focus as in the journal.

Attitude: This has increased in amount of positiveness.

Personal Relations: Maintains fairly low priority as was the case in the journal.

Practical Skills: The major feature in the interview. Gradual buildup from prior semesters.

Investment: Still a low priority item, but more concern registered than previously.

Assessment: Appears to maintain a similar focus as in the journal.

STUDENT B

View of Work: More keyed into theory and practice. Appears more important than in journal entries.

Attitude: Not clear. Minimal reflections on this whereas it was a major theme in the journal.

Personal Relations: Somewhat more attention to this compared with the minimal attention in the journal.

Practical Skills: Mature outlook on this. Not really focusing on the "tricks of the trade," but appears to see the scene of skill attainment.

Investment: Seems committed to teaching as a career. More students relate to a teaching career than in journal entries.

Assessment: Does not cue into this as much as in the journal. Seems objective about evaluation, not "hyper."

STUDENT C

View of Work: Intensification of comment and concern in this category. This could be because of some teaching experience in 1986-1987.

Attitude: This area shows more concern than the journal entries reveal, and it may be due to some challenges in first year of teaching. Overall, attitude maintains its positive balance.

Personal Relations: About the same as that indicated in earlier journal entries. Similar distribution of positive and negative commentary.

Practical Skills: Appears to be less emphasis here than in the journal entries.

Investment: Comment here is actually more than in the journal. This may also reflect concerns about employment.

Assessment: Little concern or emphasis noted in the journal and that lower priority continues in the interview.

STUDENT D

View of Work: This area diminished. Little linking between theory and practice. Does have some comments about her "own" school.

Attitude: Continues positive but the statements are nonreflecting.

Personal Relations: Concern and feeling for this area is intensified when compared with the prior journal entries.

Practical Skills: This area is deemphasized. Little linking of techniques with schools and teaching.

Investment: This focuses in an entirely different fashion. There is no statement or career goals, and there seems to be confusion over the commitment to teaching.

Assessment: Objective about self. Does not appear to be concerned about assessment as an area which is continuation of journal entries.

Implications

With the refinement of the category system and the interview schedule and even closer scrutiny of the journal entries of preservice teachers, the investigators will be even better prepared to monitor the work of beginning teachers once they leave the university setting. The overall results of this study ought to be circular: if we can determine more precisely what happens to preservice teachers in their college and university training, we ought to be able to better assist beginning teachers in their process of induction into the world of work.

Likewise, if we can determine more precisely what happens to beginning inservice teachers in their induction process, we may be able to develop better teacher education programs that meet the needs of beginning teachers at either the pre-service or inservice level.

APPENDIX

CATEGORY SYSTEM

View of Work

Perception:

-Problem sense
-Theory to practice
-Child development
-Reflections
-Interpret child

Relationships or views:

-Interpret class work
-Organization of class

Getting handle on work

Observation on teaching

Contrasting teaching

Attitude

Positive reaction

Negative reaction or frustration

Anxiety or suspicion

Empathy

Objective view

Doubt

Personal Relations

Observation of others

Making friends with child

Making friends with teacher

Parents or others

Problems with others

Practical Skills

Idea gain

Fitting into system

Something works

Doesn't work

Media ideas/work

Motivation

Idea confusion

Observation/description

Investment

Vigor

Commitment

Concern over drive

Negative drive

Assessment

Self

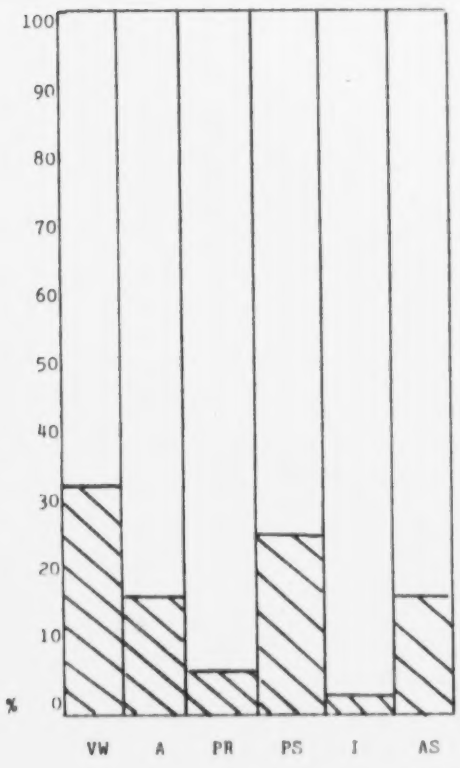
Of others

System

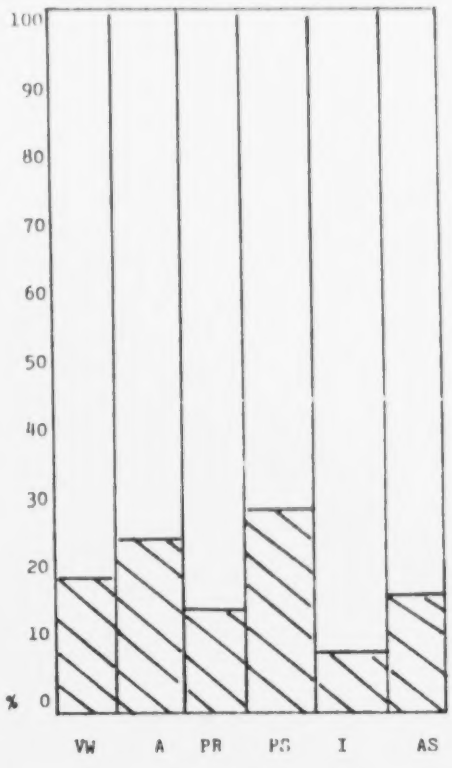
From others

Student A

	CURRICULUM I		CURRICULUM II	
	# of Entries	Percentage	# of Entries	Percentage
View of Work	106	31	39	19
Attitude	61	18	45	22
Personal Relations	18	5	27	13
Practical Skills	84	25	56	27
Investment	11	3	13	6
Assessment	61	18	29	14
TOTAL	341	100	209	100



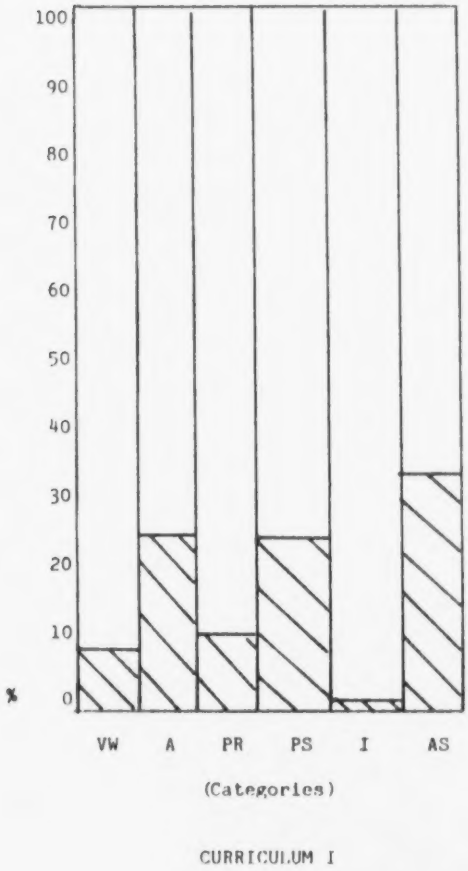
CURRICULUM I



CURRICULUM II

Student B

	CURRICULUM I		CURRICULUM II	
	# of Entries	Percentage	# of Entries	Percentage
View of Work	3	8	21	15
Attitude	9	24	32	22
Personal Relations	4	10	19	13
Practical Skills	9	24	25	18
Investment	1	2	10	7
Assessment	12	32	35	25
TOTAL	38	100	142	100



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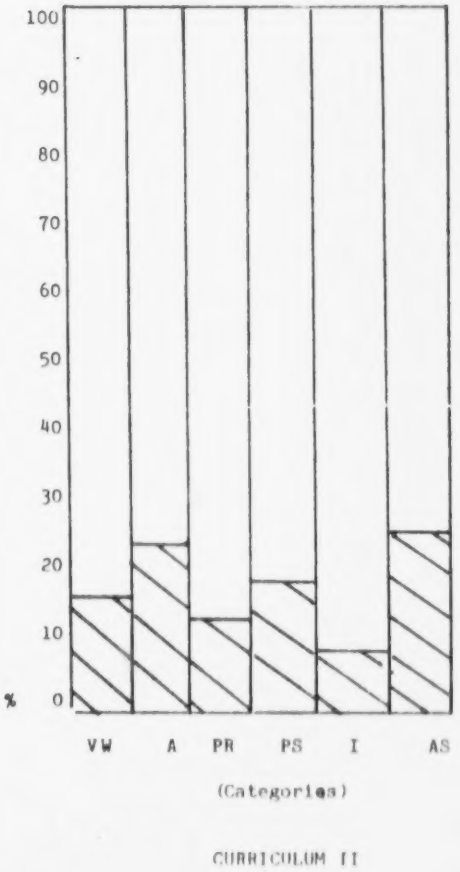
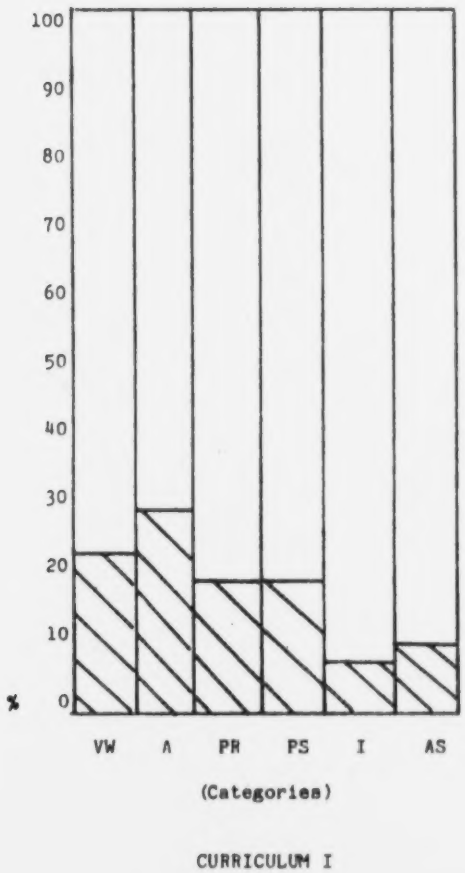
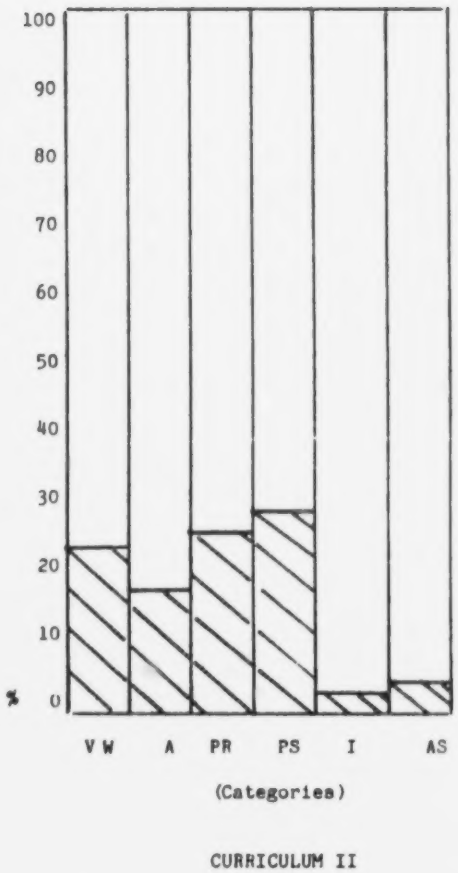


CURRICULUM II

Student C

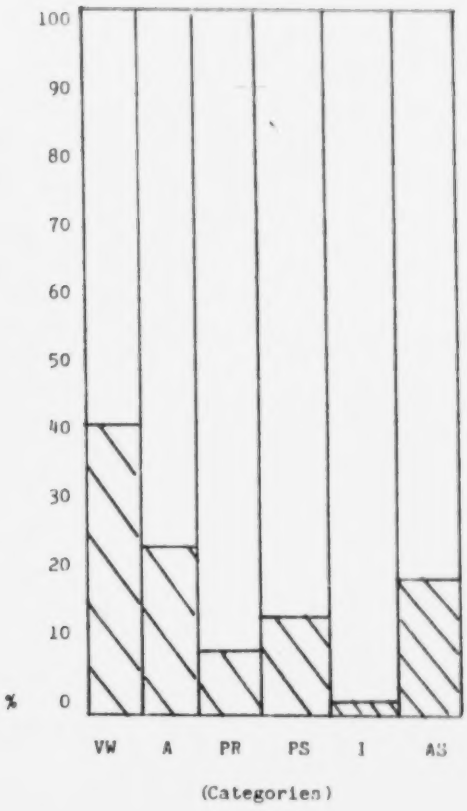
	CURRICULUM I		CURRICULUM II	
	# of Entries	Percentage	# of Entries	Percentage
View of Work	17	21	29	22
Attitude	22	28	22	17
Personal Relations	14	18	35	26
Practical Skills	14	18	37	28
Investment	5	6	4	3
Assessment	7	9	5	4
TOTAL	79	100	132	100



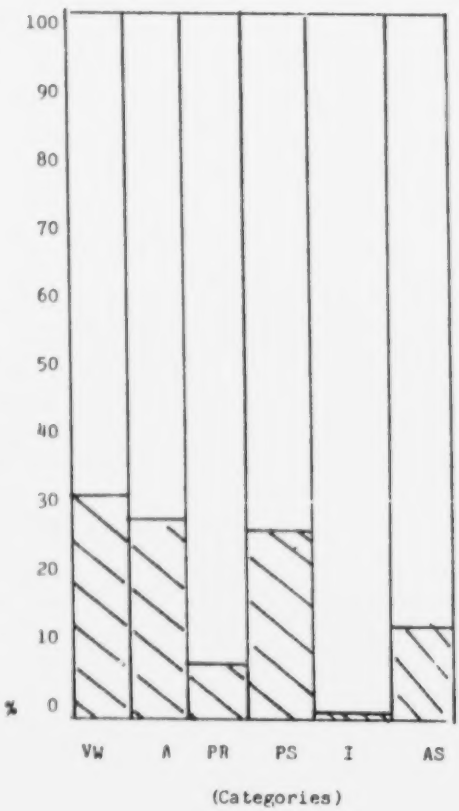


Student D

	CURRICULUM I		CURRICULUM II	
	# of Entries	Percentage	# of Entries	Percentage
View of Work	85	40	52	30
Attitude	46	22	47	27
Personal Relations	17	8	9	5
Practical Skills	24	11	44	26
Investment	4	2	1	1
Assessment	36	17	19	11
TOTAL	212	100	172	100



CURRICULUM I



CURRICULUM II

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR

STUDENT-SUBJECTS

I. Assessment

A. How do you assess yourself as a teacher?

B. How do you think others assess you as a teacher?

II. View of Work

Does your preparation for teaching connect with the work you are doing in your classroom now?

III. Practical Skills

Do you find yourself caught up with continuing to look for "tricks of the trade"?

IV. Attitude

What are some of your personal reactions to teaching?

V. Personal Relations

Thinking about personal relations in the schoolhouse, what is your situation?

VI. Investment

What is your future as a teacher?

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR

COLLEGE SUPERVISORS

I. Assessment

A. How do you think _____ assessed himself/herself as a teacher?

B. How do you think he/she thought others assessed him/her as a teacher?

II. View of Work

Do you think _____ thought his/her preparation for teaching connected with the work he/she was doing in the classroom?

III. Practical Skills

Do you think _____ is caught up with continuing to look for "tricks of the trade"?

*IV. Attitude

What do you think were some of _____'s personal reactions to teaching?

V. Personal Relations

Thinking about personal relations in the schoolhouse, what do you think _____ thought his/her situation was?

VI. Investment

How do you think _____ perceives his/her future as a teacher?

*Began interviews with this question.

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